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C O N F I D E N T I A L LJUBLJANA 000628

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MD](#) [SI](#)

SUBJECT: RUPEL ON TRANSNISTRIAN ELECTIONS, SOUTH OSSETIA

Classified By: CDA Maryruth Coleman for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) After meeting with Minsk Group Co-Chairs on Karabakh (septel), Slovenian FM and OSCE CIO Dmitrij Rupel pulled aside Ambassador Steven Mann for a private talk on Transnistria. He said that he had spoken with Ukrainian FM Tarasyuk a few days previously and Tarasyuk had talked up the Ukrainian plan for Transnistria, focusing on plans for elections in Transnistria. Tarasyuk claimed that the plan was receiving EU and US backing and he solicited Rupel's assistance in putting together observers for the planned December elections. Rupel said he was very cautious about the elections. He cautions were intensified by Ukraine's request to send, as a high-level observer for the elections, the former head of the Slovenian Communist Party. He told Tarasyuk that this person's background might not make him the best choice to reinforce a democratic election process. Tarasyuk then asked Slovenia to nominate an alternative candidate. The CIO asked for US views on the situation.

2. (C) Mann said that we had welcomed the advent of Ukraine into conflict settlement. The situation had been frozen because of Russian and Transnistrian intransigence and the Kuchma regime's corruption and inefficiency. The Yushchenko administration had given us hope for a solution. Each month, though, we had seen our hopes cut back. Ukraine was concentrating on the feel-good parts of a Transnistria solution and was avoiding necessary, tough aspects such as Russian munitions and peacekeeper withdrawal and effective border controls. Worse, it appeared that Tkach was pressing forward on elections in a way that would not give a free and fair basis but would legitimate the Tiraspol regime.

3. (C) For that reason, Mann said, he had dispatched his deputy to Kiev to attend a meeting today convened by Tkach. The message the US would convey was the need to be realistic in looking to any Transnistria elections. Fair elections take a long time to prepare. They involve much more than counting ballots and it was not realistic to believe that they could occur in December. If Tkach persisted in moving forward with a flawed and incomplete plan, despite many months of detailed and candid consultations between Washington and Kiev, the US would warn him that we may publicly disassociate ourselves from the Ukrainian initiative.

4. (C) Rupel welcomed the US misgivings; they tracked with his own. He conveyed his understanding from Tarasyuk that the elections might indeed be put off until the Spring to take account of criticisms that the preparatory time was too short. He asked for the US view in that event; Mann replied that we would consider whether the groundwork could be done with a longer lead time but that given Tkach's approach thus far, we would be skeptical.

5. (C) Rupel also passed on a report that Transnistrian strongman Smirnov had worn out his welcome with Moscow and that Russia was preparing for a new leader in Transnistria. He did not know the name but believed that it would be one of the current ministers in the Transnistria administration.

6. (C) In advance of Rupel's Sunday stop in Georgia, Mann advised the CIO that the US would be taking a fresh look at possibilities for progress in South Ossetia. We would be encouraging Georgia to move ahead on the Zhvania-Kokoity commitments and we would be encouraging Russia to have their South Ossetia clients reach out a hand as well. Rupel told of a recent meeting he had with Georgian Parliament Speaker Nino Burjanadze in which she upbraided him for not supporting President Saakashvili's Strasbourg proposals.

7. (U) Amb. Mann has cleared this cable.

COLEMAN

NNNN

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